NOTES ON

PRINTING FOR AUTHORS.

LITERARY ETIQUETTE,

BY

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CARD SERIES No. 3.

22501251640

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London

ADLARD AND SON

20 HANOVER SQUARE, W., & BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE, E.C

1903

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London and Dorking.

LITERARY ETIQUETTE.

LITERARY ETIQUETTE may be said to include in one category the Ethics and the Good Manners of the world of letters. It may be said more particularly to govern the region not affected by the Law of Copyright or by written agreements between individuals. Yet Literary Ethics are still chiefly concerned with *meum* and *tuum* and common honesty—with rights and obligations that hold good in honour if not in law. At first sight they would seem to require no especial code of their own, were it not that, in the literary world, a standard of morals has long existed very different from that which is familiar in the ordinary affairs of life. A man may be scrupulously honest towards his tradesmen and private creditors, but will think nothing of appropriating the labours of another man's brain, that labour than which nothing is higher, more arduous, or more individual. Literary dishonesty is doubtless promoted and protected by the very intangibility, the seeming elusiveness of the mysterious and sacred products of genius or true talent. Yet, as the late Sir Walter Besant, that great pioneer of the Rights of Authors, remarked in the first volume of 'The Author' (vol. i, p. 6, 1891), "literary property is a

very real thing. It is as real as property in land, houses, mines, or any other kind of property." Again, "When a man has made a book he has increased the wealth of the country, provided it be a book serviceable to the community and saleable." "He has created this wealth; it is his own." "Literary property is subject to the laws which protect all other property; the simplest and the most comprehensive of these laws is the eighth commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal.'"

Plagiarism, or the theft of what others have written, is, in its various forms, the arch-crime of literature, and it would not be necessary to single it out for particular mention, any more than it would be necessary to condemn forgery, were it not that it is customarily condoned by the public conscience, which at no time has been very alert or, indeed, very awakened in matters intellectual. In its most shameless form, plagiarism, the theft of another man's brains, becomes piracy, or the theft of another man's property in the fruits of the labours of his mind. The old robust piracy may be said to rank almost with the things of the past: the Berne Convention has put a stop to much wrong-doing. Yet there are legal forms of piracy, both in Great Britain and on the high seas of literature—between the United States of America, for instance, and the Mother Country, which, though not exactly punishable in any court of law or under the International Code of Copyright, are none the less contrary to

literary ethics. Literary good manners are so closely interwoven with the ethics of literature that we shall best describe both by setting them forth in a short code.

1. It would be well, if one could get at the facts in each case, to discountenance the custom of reprinting and selling editions of books, the authors of which, for various reasons, but chiefly through the need of ready money, have sold their copyrights, and are therefore unbenefited while others make profits out of their labours. In the United States, for instance, one may come across some sumptuous edition upon rare paper, issued to a number of opulent subscribers, of a work originally published in London on the honourable understanding that it was to appear in a limited edition only. The work may be a classic in its way, but the writer, having sold his copyright on the understanding that the edition was to be limited, can now only stand by, glowing with vicarious satisfaction, while others pocket a large sum. He has probably trusted to the mere word of mouth of a man he took to be a gentleman: he has no remedy. The astute will laugh at him doubtless, but the decent-minded will sympathise. Literary etiquette requires all concerned to protect authors, those infants of the pen, against themselves, never to exploit them, always to remember that justice and honour rank above profits.

2. If you employ a secretary or other subordinate, or a hack writer, to "get up facts" for you and to

embody them, page after page, in a manuscript which you afterwards print unaltered, sign with your full style and all your titles, and give to the world, have the grace to couple his name with your own on the title-page. Do not merely say in an obscure foot-note, burrowing at the bottom of a page, "I am indebted to Mr. Brown for much of the research entailed in compiling this book." Since Mr. Brown actually *wrote* the book for you this is not a just or candid statement of the case. Since Mr. Brown is perhaps young, struggling, and at your mercy, and you are notoriously incapable of literary flights, the discerning public will be apt to come to conclusions of its own, however deftly Mr. Brown may be obscured.

3. In writing a preface, which is the proper field for displays of literary chivalry, be fair at all costs to all parties. Do not announce yourself as intensely obliged to Sir So-and-so, G.C.M.G., while Mr. Smith, a much more serviceable ally, goes unthanked. Bear in mind that in the Republic of Letters there is no respect of persons. Recollect also that in dealing with the literary you have to do with people who command the ear of futurity, and are capable of a sort of keen perpetual revenge. Your victims may skit you in perpetuity long after the suggestionised critics of the hour have left off praising you, in such indelible records as biographies, republished correspondence, and bibliographies (in which last, because you have suppressed Mr. Brown or Mr. Smith, your

name may appear with a mark of interrogation in front of it).

4. If you employ a hack writer to make, say, a translation for you, come to an agreement with him on paper before he begins his work. Do not let him supply you with many written pages, and, in the absence of an agreement, forget to pay, or, worse still, refuse to pay, on the ground that you have had to re-write many of them. The man has laboured in your behalf, he should be paid, even supposing his work to have been useless to you. If he be a person of a certain literary attainment and reputation, any objections made by you to his manner of performing his task, besides being wounding to his *amour-propre* in a greater or less degree, may prove seriously unjust or even libellous. You cannot, in matters of business, be too careful of other people's literary reputations. A man does not cease to have a literary reputation because you employ him, and if you insult his work you may be guilty of grave libel. Many criticisms are merely libels in disguise.

5. Never trade upon your employé's modesty, or his belief in your integrity, or his unbusinesslike methods, whereby he omits to ask you for a written agreement or a proper definition of how you stand to one another. The agreement as to work to be done should come from the stronger party—the employer. A good publisher, for whom we once had the pleasure of working, carried a stamped written agreement in his pocket, and produced it for our signature

at the very moment that we undertook to do certain work for him. There was no desire in this instance to rush one into obligations blindfold; we read the agreement and thanked our publisher, who was a personal friend, for being businesslike in circumstances where business might have been regarded as a negligible quantity.

6. Use inverted commas when quoting another writer, and indicate the source whence your passage has been drawn, even if that source be only a daily paper. It is at all times a crime to "lift" other people's prose, especially when they are too obscure or inattentive to defend themselves. Name your author and your source of quotation, even though in so doing you be dubbed a mere man of "scissors and paste."

The foregoing paragraphs upon the Ethics of Hack Work and Quotation are particularly applicable in scientific and especially in medical writing, for, in this last, compilation is the rule, and quotation and the collaboration of others are more frequent than in any other branch of literature. Let us add two little injunctions to this section of our theme.

7. Do not cloak literary infamy, or attempt to palliate the theft of another man's brains with the cant phrase "that is what always happens."

8. In all matters of literary *meum* and *tuum* err rather in the direction of punctilio than of omission.

9. A word or two as to the Etiquette of Style and Taste. In reviewing or criticising other men's books,

and, indeed, in all you write, avoid whatever savours of partisanship, class hatred, *odium theologicum*, and so forth. Do not damn a writer because authors or journals of an opposite persuasion in politics to yours happen to praise. Never condemn an author in perpetuity without a hearing, or, more correctly, a reading. Do not say, "This is by Miss So-and-so," and proceed to cry anathema, as do certain superior persons. Read the works of those you criticise. Do not set up as a critic of poetry because you have a particular dislike to the Muse. Do not damn people because they are young, or, when young yourself, make a petulant war on the deserving old. A tried contributor of forty-five turned off, without a moment's warning, by an uppish editor of twenty, who has bought himself into a chair of office, is a sight to make the angels weep, if, indeed, the celestials concern themselves in matters literary. Avoid "scarification" and "log-rolling." Remember that in a few years all your "grandezzas" will be judged at their proper value. Remember the fate of the merciless critic of Keats, one Gifford, now so contemptible in just men's eyes. Avoid malevolent *clichés*. Do not, for instance, commit the vulgarity of always referring to some statesman as "the fine flower of Oxford culture," when you most condemn him. The sneer does not hurt an ancient University, and suggests sour grapes. The *cliché*, after all, is only an outcome of suggestionisation, that curse of an age which idolises short cuts in thought and its

own semi-education. The *cliché* is a dominant force among us; it is also a mark of imperfect mental training and bad manners. Because some writer, who knows little Latin and less Greek, praises illiteracy as a form of "freshness" and "originality," have nothing to do with that worst form of cant, *Ex nihilo nihil*. There is no such thing as spontaneous generation in literature; most of the world's masterpieces have been the result of infinite labour and culture. Turn a deaf ear, pray, to those admired modern critics who would have us all come, mentally and æsthetically, naked and unpedigreed into the arena of literature. Ignorance is *not* the preliminary condition of perfection in letters and in taste. It is these critics who have invented the ridiculous phrase "complex modernity," fortunately not so popular now as a few years ago. Such a phrase is a form of literary under-breeding; it betrays ignorance of history and much else. Our modernities grow archaic as we write, and are far more insipid than the antiquities of even the forties of last century. An antiquated and dodo-like thing is the "New Woman;" the "New Diplomacy" is already senile; the "Problem" is in a decline. It is to be hoped that the "New Thought" will soon be as they. Japanese art, though it has some devotees worthy of respect, was mainly the discovery of those critics to whom the Frieze of the Parthenon and the Frescoes in the Sistine are incomprehensible or a bore. Literary good manners—the good breeding of style—

abhors *Schwärmerei*, and requires every writer to meditate the sincerity of any remarks he may chance to make on "the problem," "modernity," or "Japan."

10. Yet perhaps Taste is on the wane, and sins against Taste matter less than sins against the Light. Pseudo-science is in the ascendant, and its sun has hatched out of their cocoons whole hosts of old superstitions, such as Phrenology, Palmistry, Crystal-gazing, the Planchette, and has brought to full maturity the recent growths of Christian Science, Bacon's authorship of Shakespeare's Plays, Anti-Vaccination, Anti-Vivisection, and the *cliché* "Science is played out." A writer of balanced mind will shun these things as so many forms of mental ill-breeding.

11. They spell decadence, of which the worst recent development—if we may use the phrase—is savagery. Printed brutality, bloodthirstiness, and other stigmata of decadence are ill manners as well as a debasement of the moral currency. Literature and civilisation go hand in hand, and when letters are brutalised humanity is the poorer. Literary brutality is worse than a split infinitive; the gentle 'Elia' remains greater than many idols of the hour.

12. In all you write be careful to give contemporaries their proper titles. The famous dead alone can afford to dispense with titles of courtesy. We do not of course speak of "Mr." John Milton, but it is only courteous to write of "Mr. Meredith." Such a phrase as "Kitchener and Chamberlain make speeches" is jaunty and uncivil. On the other

hand, do not call names. The term "minor poet" is offensive. We do not speak of "minor painters" or "minor actors," though there is as much mediocrity in the world of the brush and the buskin as in that of the lyre. The Bard should be protected by the memory of the greatest Englishman who ever lived—Shakespeare the poet.

13. A word on the subject of manners. Literary bigwigs are generally well treated in Society. To put it bluntly, they are usually prosperous, and as such they make their appeal to the vulgar in a fashion the vulgar understand. There is, however, a whole world of intellectuals whom it is customary to snub, partly through ignorance, partly through crass dislike of the things of the mind. Now there is such a thing as intellectual tact, and no nation can be called truly civilised that lacks or neglects it. It is an ugly sight, in a drawing-room full of presumably "nice" and educated people, to see a fine and conscientious writer treated a little worse than a nonentity, his works unknown even down to their titles. It is an ugly thing to note the total neglect in which a wit is often allowed to rust by his own kinsfolk or fellow-townsmen. It is an ugly thing to mark the scant measure of courtesy often meted out, say, at a scientific congress, to some foreigner whose intellect is of world-wide reputation. As a nation we have still to learn "Who's who" in matters of the mind, and to carry our new knowledge into the affairs of official and social intercourse as punctili-

ously as we carry our eager recognition of rank, muscular prowess, and lucre.

14. It is perhaps as well for the average writer on abstruse topics that he can leave his manuscript lying open almost anywhere, seeing that prying people, other than rivals, will never think of reading it. But when such an author dies his literary remains should at once become sacred, even in the eyes of those who care for them least. They should be sent to libraries or entrusted to competent editors. On no account should they be burnt, for the reason alleged by the daughter of a learned writer, who excused the destruction of all the great man's papers on the ground that "dear papa's rubbish was so in the way." A pupil of John Hunter is held up to execration to-day, though in burning the great surgeon's papers he was only obeying his illustrious master's express wishes; and the notorious destruction, on moral grounds, of one of her husband's MSS. by the late Lady —— is a literary crime of the first magnitude, which is nowise palliated by the rumour that the ultra-conscientious lady caused the obnoxious work to be copied by a type-writer before she threw it into the flames. These holocausts are, alas! typical of many obscurer conflagrations.

15. Much has been said concerning Editors and Publishers, and their sins against the ethics and etiquette of literature. The reason for these offences is obvious: these two classes of employers come into gross palpable business relations with their employés,

but they are really no greater sinners against authorship than the public at large, or than some authors above described. They sin specifically—that is all—in money matters and matters of contract, matters quite obvious, as it were; whereas the public sin in all directions and in ways not obvious at all. It is part of the original injustice of things that authors, the most sensitive class of men, with goods to sell of imponderable weight and rarely estimable value, cannot take their wares to market in Utopia! Since they cannot, they must perforce remember that business rules apply even to the sale of inspirations.

16. Editors should stand in a business relation to those from whom they buy: they should not content themselves by merely *professing* the business spirit on all occasions. An editor, for instance, has no *right* to order an article and then to return it unused after a long lapse of time accompanied by the customary printed formula of rejection. For all the weeks and months that an article is kept lying idle the ideal editor would pay rent! Only the bad bold editor tampers with his contributor's prose and verse without first informing him: only the bad bold editor hides under such specious terms as "commerce" and "contract," when he knows all the time that he is dealing quite uncommercially and arbitrarily with peculiarly helpless slaves—for such his contributors really are.

17. Some publishers, the "fluffy" of their kind, are proverbial for lax and cryptic treatment of the

small fry of authorship. An honourable publisher will of course be careful to render his quarterly accounts even in the case of those whose books are not selling well.

18. Finally, let us remember that in all the fields of literature, as in the affairs of ordinary life, honesty is the best policy, candour and kindliness are the sole things that count in the long run. Though it may raise a smile and subject the writer of this little essay to the imputation of *naïveté*, yet would he assert that in literature, as much as in good society, honour is always to be preferred to smart business methods.

ADLARD & SON.

A.D. 1766.

LONDON AND DORKING.

OFFICE:

20 HANOVER SQUARE, W.

PRINTING WORKS:

BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE, E.C.

AND

DORKING.